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ABSTRACT

A discussion is presented on a cluster of related research studies conducted on the adequacy of multicultural education in current teacher education programs. The first was designed to determine whether preservice teachers lack relevant background experiences in multicultural settings, perceive a need for multicultural training, and would be willing to participate in such training. This information was obtained by means of a a 14-item questionnaire administered to 125 preservice teacher education students. The second study involved the administration of the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory as a pre- and post-test measure to preservice and inservice teachers who had taken three courses on the multicultural society and cross-cultural environments. The third research effort focused on a program, "The Minority Mentorship Project," in which undergraduate elementary education majors were linked as mentors with elementary minority students. An analysis of study results indicated that preservice teachers have limited experience and background in multicultural settings, but that a course devoted to multicultural content can raise sensitivity levels and cultural awareness. The results of the third study highlighted the benefits of early hands-on experience in the field. (JD)

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Multicultural Education:
What Educators Know, What They Need to Know

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Multicultural Education:

What Educators Know, What They Need to Know

Fueled by reform recent movements, the educational pendulum has moved in the direction of back-to-basics, and with this changing emphasis the enthusiastic support for multicultural education which was apparent in the 1960's and 1970's has waned. However, the reality of the classroom still exists; diversity in the classroom has not decreased. Rather the demographic trends show that the number of minority students in schools is increasing. For example, in Texas for the first time, the number of minority students in kindergarten and first grade is larger than the number of majority (Anglo) students. At the same time, however, the number of minorities entering colleges and universities is decreasing (Blacks about 1,000,00, 1979 to 990,000, 1984). Hispanic enrollment in colleges is gaining; yet, this gain does not reflect an appropriate percentage of the students who complete high school (Astin, 1982). In addition, these numbers mean that fewer minorities are entering the field of teaching.

The educational implications of such statistics are staggering. This diversity in the classroom coupled with a severe lack of minority role models and potential mentors has caused educators to examine the efforts of university based teacher preparation programs and their ability to adequately prepare future teachers to meet the needs of the vast range of

students from differing social, cultural, economic, and linguistic backgrounds. Unfortunately, many well meaning educational opportunities do not provide long-term participation experiences; many are short term, "quick fixes." Part of the problem seems to be that multicultural education programs have been implemented haphazardly. They seem to exist in limbo, as adjuncts to major programs or as separate add on courses (Baptiste, 1979; Grant, 1986). This isolated, fragmented and piecemeal nature of multicultural education in the teacher preparation programs and the overlapping and often conflicting efforts of university personnel appear to give students an incomplete picture. The research and the changing demographics in the United States both underline the need for future teacher educators to be more adequately prepared. We are putting students at risk if we expect teachers to be effective in a context for which they are untrained or poorly prepared.

This paper will discuss a cluster of related research studies being conducted to assess the nature and adequacy of an existing teacher education program and will examine the development of innovative ways in which the university curriculum may be adapted to more fully prepare students to meet the varying needs of the public school population.

Assessing Pre-Service Teachers' Backgrounds and Future Needs

Schools are staffed by a majority of White, nonurban middle class, monolingual individuals (Santos, 1986), and this fact may have serious ramifications in terms of teacher expectations and

student achievement (Stanton, 1981). As Banks (1986, p. 16-17) so aptly notes, "teachers are human beings who bring their cultural perspectives, values, hopes, and dreams to the classroom. They also bring their prejudices, stereotypes, and misconceptions. Teachers' values and perspectives mediate and interact with what they teach, and influence the way messages are communicated and perceived by their students." Thus, it is necessary to examine teachers' backgrounds and experiences to determine the types of attitudes they may bring into the classroom. Consequently, in this first research effort, a questionnaire was designed to determine whether pre-service teachers 1) lack relevant background experiences in multicultural settings; 2) perceive a personal and/or professional need for multicultural training, and finally, 3) would be willing to participate in such training.

The 14 item questionnaire was administered to 125 pre-service teachers who were students in the teacher preparation program at a large state university. The sample included 68 secondary education majors or content area majors seeking secondary certification and 57 elementary education majors. Information was elicited from students in three general areas: actual coursework taken in the area of multicultural issues, individual attitudes toward and previous background experiences in a multicultural setting; and perceptions concerning the adequacy of their coursework/training as well as their future needs.

In regard to previous coursework in multicultural education, the survey highlighted the fact that half of the students had received no actual coursework in multicultural education or perceived that they had not been exposed to multicultural information in their classes. Furthermore, the variety of answers from the remainder of the respondents demonstrated the haphazard and fragmented nature of the multicultural options available to teacher preparation students.

Next, several questions attempted to elicit information from the respondents concerning their attitudes toward multicultural settings as well as actual experiences they may have had in a culturally pluralistic environment. Overall, students reported few personal experiences in culturally diverse settings, and in addition, they highlighted the fact that the multicultural efforts of the schools were fragmented "extras" at best.

Finally, the pre-service teachers were asked if they were being adequately prepared through their education programs to teach in a culturally diverse environment. Overwhelmingly, it was the future teachers' perception that they were ill equipped to encounter diversity in the classroom, and they were eager for any type of relevant information to help them over anticipated rough spots.

From the results of the survey, these pre-service teachers fit the pattern of much of the research. Their previous experiences in culturally pluralistic settings are indeed limited. Few had many relevant, long-term interaction with

people of other races and cultures. In addition, their coursework appeared to be very fragmented; there was no set sequence of multicultural courses. Students could pick from a list of options which varied greatly in quality and quantity of information provided. However, one fact was clear. These future teachers realized the shortcomings of their education. Not only do they feel inadequately prepared, they are also very desirous of obtaining more information.

Preparing Teachers Through Coursework

It is the task of teacher education programs to help pre-service as well as in-service teachers develop positive attitudes toward their own culture and the culture of others. This is not an easy task because "teacher education programs in the United States have not changed as much as they should have in order to accommodate the rapid growth and development of our society and world" (Baker, 1977, p. 71). Historically, teacher/administrator preparation institutions have trained educators to work effectively with one group of students -- middle-class Anglos. Thus, teachers are a product of an ethnocentric curriculum (Craft, 1981) which only serves to ill equip them to deal with diversity in the classroom where students may come not only from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds but also from urban, rural, and even pre-industrial cultures. Aragon (1973, p. 77) describes the conditions as they exist today as "culturally deficient educators attempting to teach culturally different children."

Furthermore, according to many academic measures of school success (standardized/achievement tests and competency tests), minority students do not perform at the same level as non-minority students (with the exception of Asian American students). The correlation among: 1) educators' sensitivity (attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward students of other cultures), 2) knowledge and application of cultural awareness information, and 3) minority students' successful academic performance is significant.

Studies have indicated that race and social class are powerful factors in determining the level of expectation educators set for children (Chinn & Gollnick, 1986; Callahan & Clark, 1983). Many times, teachers/administrators are unprepared to acknowledge the cultural differences and educational inequalities that schools often perpetuate. These teachers/administrators may find it difficult to understand that while minority students have the potential to be successful, they are often not given an opportunity to develop their social and academic skills.

Therefore, the impact of classroom based instruction in multicultural issues will be explored. This second research study involved the administration of the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory developed by Gertrude Henry (1985) as a pre- and post-test measure to ascertain the level of sensitivity and cultural awareness of pre-service and in-service teachers and administrators.

The 28 item self-administered questionnaire, using a Likert type scale addressed such questions as general cultural awareness, the family, communication, assessment, and multicultural methods and materials.

Three classes at a predominately white university were selected to participate in the survey: one undergraduate class of pre-service elementary education teachers (total pre-test 27, post-test 25) and two graduate classes of pre-service administrators and in-service teachers and administrators (total pre-test 24, post-test 19). All participants were administered the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) as a pre-test (at the beginning of the course) and as a post-test (at the end of the course).

Three courses, Foundations of Education in a Multicultural Society (for pre-service teachers), Strategies for Teaching the Disadvantaged, and Educational Administration in Cross-Cultural Environments (for pre-service and in-service teachers and administrators), served as treatment to raise the sensitivity levels and increase the cultural awareness information for participants. The course content included such activities as: 1) in-depth lectures about the historical, philosophical, and social foundations of education of minority groups (e.g., Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asian Americans and 2) cultural awareness activities, (e.g., researching the history, culture, values, and educational aspects--learning styles, and effective teaching strategies--of minority students; role playing; self

disclosure exercises and analysis of case studies).

Findings derived from the analysis of the pre- and post-tests indicated the degree to which courses whose content emphasizes ethnic awareness positively changed the attitudes, beliefs and values of educators to work more effectively with minority students.

By using factor analysis with a varimax rotation involving fifteen statements, four dimensions were formed. These dimensions were: 1) sense of responsibility 2) discomfort with a different culture 3) accommodation of cultural differences and 4) adaption as the child's responsibility.

Results of the post-test indicated that most pre-service and in-service teachers and administrators felt very strongly that it was the responsibility of educators to provide multicultural experiences for all students in their future or respective educational settings. However, after taking the courses, the pre-service and in-service teachers and administrators continue to reflect much discomfort in working with children of different cultures and relating to minority parents. It should be noted that this high degree of discomfort causes serious concerns about the complexity involved in helping educators feel comfortable when working with the two most valuable resources in the educational process, minority students and their parents. This is a most significant factor in minority student achievement. According to the post-test results the participants' attitudes and beliefs about making the necessary accommodations for

cultural differences increased significantly. Most of the participants indicated that they would institute physical environmental changes such as ethnic displays.

Additionally, over half of the participants felt that it was not the student's responsibility to make needed adaptations to cultural adjustment in the school environment but rather the teacher's and administrator's responsibility. Overall, the results imply that multicultural education courses can raise the sensitivity levels and cultural awareness levels of educators through classroom instructions and interactions.

This research supports many previous studies that have indicated that educators who are not sensitive to needs of minority students are not aware of cultural conflicts that cause barriers in the learning processes of minority students (Gollnick & Chinn, 1986; DeCosta, 1986; Gilbert & Gay, 1985). These barriers may result in minority students' underachievement. However, effective teacher/school research has indicated that teachers/administrators who are successful with minority students possess high levels of sensitivity to the needs of those students (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Brookover, et al., 1982). These teachers/administrators also possess the necessary cultural awareness knowledge to produce high achieving minority students. Therefore, teachers/administrators must be trained not to be threatened by individual differences but to build upon those differences to create a learning environment that is effective for all students, regardless of ethnic/racial identity. Yet, one

course in multicultural education is not the solution. The philosophical concepts and processes of multicultural education must be integrated in all courses for teachers and school administrators, if institutions are to prepare all educators to work effectively with the changing diverse population.

Preparing Teachers Through Interaction with Minority Children

The general consensus in the literature is that teachers must be trained to be competent and accountable for a diverse student population, and the logical point to train teachers to work with cultural diversity would seem to be at the undergraduate level. However, many educators question the actual effects of classroom knowledge (Grant, 1986). In other words, "is it really possible for colleges of education to influence pre- and in-service teachers to modify the attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, and beliefs of a lifetime in order to prepare those prospective teachers for successful cross cultural interaction in the public school arena?" (Santos, 1986, p. 20). Educators contend that pre-service teachers need actual experiences to multicultural education prior to being released into the real classroom.

This final research effort focuses on program innovation. The Minority Mentorship Project at Texas A & M was developed as a means of providing early hands-on field experience for elementary education majors. The project links undergraduate elementary education majors as mentors with elementary minority students (mentees). Two goals of the project are to raise sensitivity

levels of both participants (mentor and mentees) and to develop instructional skills that are necessary for teachers to work effectively in a pluralistic, diverse society.

The Minority Mentorship Project is currently beginning its second year. In the spring of 1987, twenty-six education majors were selected to participate in the mentorship program. After volunteers were solicited from undergraduate classes, they were interviewed and selected by a network of community leaders, teachers, and university personnel who volunteered their services for the project. All prospective mentors had completed thirty hours of university coursework, demonstrated a strong commitment to an education career, and possessed a strong desire to work with minority students.

Beginning in the fall of 1987, selected education majors were enrolled in the first of six, one-hour seminars, (one per semester) planned by a faculty member with expertise in multicultural education. This seminar was designed to broaden the pedagogical knowledge base, sharpen the teaching skills, and modify attitudes, values and beliefs of elementary education majors who must learn to work effectively with minority students in the elementary schools. In addition, the seminars provided supervisory support and guidance, open discussions regarding mentors' responsibilities and concern issues, guest speakers, and educational strategies to help the education majors meet the needs of the project.

The twenty-six minority elementary students were selected

from a list of students who were nominated by their teachers. Guidelines for student selection included: 1) parental support and approval of the project; 2) willingness of the student to be involved in the project; 3) assessment of intellectual functioning and social and emotional development by teachers and other adults; and 4) self-evaluation by student.

During the planned six semesters of the project, the mentor and mentee will interact in planned and informal activities. During the first two semesters these activities have included picnics, frequent phone contacts, letter correspondence, attendance at football and basketball games, visits to the college library, and special holiday dinners.

Overall, the basic focus of the project has proved to be the regular tutoring sessions that were initiated during the second semester of the project. Mentors and mentees meet once a week at the mentees' schools and discuss school work or a common project selected by the pair. At this time, educational strategies are stressed and mentor and mentee are becoming acquainted on a more personal basis.

The project has contributed to the decision process of a few of the elementary education majors. Three students have changed their majors since beginning the project. One student related her decision directly to involvement in the project, stating that she had no idea what a big responsibility teaching was. It was the project activities that demonstrated the responsibility to her. Another student has remained with the project even though

she changed her major to journalism stating that the experiences in this project would be of benefit in any career.

Initial qualitative data collected through the journals of the mentors indicate growth in acceptance and understanding of Black and Hispanic children and their experiences in schools. Quantitative analysis of the data will continue to be gathered as the project continues. At the end of the first year the data will indicate changes in the academics of the elementary students. The nomination process for the second group of mentors and mentees to be selected is currently in progress.

The initial feedback from this project indicates that education majors are willing to learn about cultural differences and feel this learning is important to their careers as teachers. The attitudes and feelings of both undergraduates and elementary students are affected by interactions which are guided by university personnel who are experts in multicultural education.

Conclusions

From the results of these three research studies, it is apparent that these pre-service teachers reflect the findings of other studies. Their previous background in culturally pluralistic settings was limited. In addition, the results of the first study indicated that the coursework provided appears to be very fragmented.

However, these future teachers are aware of their limited experiential background and training, and they are desirous of obtaining relevant information and participating in early field

experiences with minority children.

The results of the second study indicated that a course devoted to multicultural content can indeed raise the sensitivity levels and cultural awareness of educators which reinforces the need to develop and provide a coherent and well integrated program.

Finally, the third research study highlighted the added benefits of early hands-on experience in the field. Such opportunities provide students the chance to work with minority children and to observe at first hand the real world classroom. Participation at this level can aid education majors to overcome stereotypes and personal barriers in working with the culturally diverse and can emphasize the myriad of responsibilities involved in teaching.

Recommendations

Several recommendations can be made from these results. First, a clear definition of multicultural education needs to be agreed upon and then a coherent program should be developed. As it exists now, many students have not been exposed to a multicultural program but rather a series of hit or miss efforts from various directions. With such an incoherent framework, it would be difficult to adequately prepare anyone to teach in a real classroom. Additionally, instructors of one course may be duplicating content from another course while other instructors may ignore the issue of cultural pluralism altogether. A firm commitment from all involved is a minimum requirement if the

program is to provide the opportunity to sensitize future teachers to cultural diversity.

Finally, in addition to coursework, students should be provided with ample opportunity to interact in a multicultural setting and to try out information they have been provided. Early field experiences with some actual hands-on time is a necessity.

In conclusion, university based teacher education must make a firm commitment to multicultural education, plan a well articulated program with clear cut goals, and strive to create opportunities for students to get out in the field and experiment with their new found knowledge. Only then will we be able to really say that we have begun to prepare teachers to deal with diversity in the classroom.

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